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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by HelpAge International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

1. HelpAge International is a global network striving for the rights of disadvantaged older people to economic and physical security; health care and social services; and support in their caregiving role across the generations. With 69 affiliates in more than 50 countries, and at least 300 other partners, the HelpAge International network brings together hundreds of organizations worldwide.

Five years on — review of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

2. The 46th session of the Commission for Social Development is critical for older men and women. It is an opportunity for Member States to take decisive action to achieve the Madrid Plan of Action target of halving old age poverty by 2015 in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

3. Today 11 per cent of the world's population is over 60 years of age; by 2050 the proportion will be 22 per cent, with the greatest increase taking place in the developing world.[1] In most societies, older people are essential contributors to their families and communities. In countries affected by HIV and AIDS, grandparents play a vital role in caring for sick people and orphans. Grandparents are the mainstay of support for children whose parents have migrated to find work or have been killed in conflict.

4. All too often however, older people are viewed in a negative light. Their contributions, past or present, are ignored, and their rights are overlooked. Whatever their circumstances, older people have the same right as anyone else to dignity, social security, an adequate standard of living, health and social services, and participation in society.

What bottom up reviews tell us

5. The Madrid Plan of Action has a bottom up review process. Bottom up reviews conducted by network members of HelpAge International during 2007 reveal that older people are still lacking financial security, good health care and participation in society. Older people want to be respected and valued for who they are and to have their rights realized.

6. HelpAge International believes that these demands can and should be achieved through the delivery of universal social (non-contributory) pensions, affordable health care and anti-discriminatory legislation.

7. Results of official regional consultations and reports of Member States on the Madrid Plan of Action reveal that while there is some progress in implementing parts of it, the political will to support older people is weak. Few Member States are using the bottom up process to assess implementation. It is increasingly evident that the views and voices of poor older women and men are not being systematically reflected in official reports. Financial resources targeted at older people are not accompanying national ageing policies.

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[1] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Population Ageing 2006 Wallchart* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.XIII.2).

Investment in older people is long overdue — age demands action

8. Renewed commitment to and implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action by Member States is critical to respond to the voiced concerns and rights of older people and the provisions of the decent work agenda. Older people themselves have the wisdom and drive to contribute to their own well-being and that of their families. Mechanisms to support them need to be developed.

9. In 2007, on 1 October, the International Day of Older Persons, older people in 27 countries met with government representatives and demanded that they fulfil their commitments under the Madrid Plan of Action and national legislation, where it exists. The year 2008 will see more action in more countries.

10. Older people said then that regular income, alongside affordable health care, are essential to securing a society for all ages. Poverty reduction in older age is and must remain a key to the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action and the realization of older people's rights. Member States must renew political will to take action on ageing, include regular income and affordable health care for all and ensure non-discriminatory legislation.

Tackling poverty through regular income and health care

11. Income insecurity, problems in accessing health care and social exclusion contribute to and exacerbate poverty. They are the major concerns of older people. Older women and men have the right to social security and access to health care. Regular income in the form of universal social pensions enables older men and women to access health care and other basic services.

12. An estimated 96 million older people still live on less than $1 per day.[2] Older men and women experience disproportionate poverty across all regions. Policies to deal with old age poverty are not still consistently included in poverty reduction strategies.

13. Older people are disproportionately poor across the world. In high income countries relative poverty is higher among older people than in the rest of the population.[3] In transition countries in Eastern Europe older people are among the poorest — in Serbia older people make up 17 per cent of the population[4] but 25 per cent of people living below the poverty line.[5] In Bolivia 63 per cent of older people, compared with 59 per cent of the total population, live in poverty[6] and in some districts in Uganda 64 per cent of older people live in absolute poverty compared with 38 per cent of the population as a whole.[7]

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[2] Figures based on World Bank Development Indicators Table, 2005; Barrientos, *Ageing, poverty and public policy in developing countries: New evidence survey*, 2006; Barrientos et al., *Old age poverty in developing countries: Contributions and dependence in later life*, 2003; Kakwani and Subbarao, *Ageing and poverty in Africa and the role of social pensions*, UNDP, 2005.

[3] UNDESA, World Economic and Social Survey 2007, p. 91.

[4] UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005*: The Strength of Diversity, 2005.

[5] *Poverty Reduction Strategy for Serbia*, Belgrade, Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2003.

[6] Bolivia Poverty Map. Unsatisfied Basic needs. Synthesis, la Paz, April 2002.

[7] Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Department of Disability and Elderly, Health Needs of Older Persons: An Assessment Report of Kamuli and Wakiso Districts, May 2002.

14. Regular income supports older people in dealing with their own health needs and in the provision of home care, particularly by older women, to other older relatives, to adult children who are sick or dying of AIDS-related illnesses and to dependent grandchildren. It is often these older women care providers who, because they have worked in the informal sector or at home and have not paid into contributory schemes, are not covered under social security schemes where they exist.

15. Regular income from pensions is vital to support children in intergenerational households, where adults have migrated for work and older people are left behind to care for young children. It enables children to have access to education and more nutritious food and can pay for fuel, water and other basic necessities. Regular income supports participation in community and family and reduces social exclusion.

16. Regular income for all older people is effective for poverty reduction and is affordable. Social grants in South Africa, which includes the social pension, have reduced destitution by two thirds and poverty levels by 48 per cent.[8] We know that universal social pensions are affordable and administratively feasible even in the least developed countries. The International Labour Organization, World Bank and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs have all estimated the cost of affordable social pensions. For the majority of 100 countries surveyed, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates that the cost of a universal social pension equivalent to $1 per day to everyone over 60 would cost below 2 per cent of gross domestic product, not only in 2005 but also in 2050, taking population ageing into account.[9]

Older people and the decent work agenda

17. Social protection is one of the four pillars of the decent work agenda, the theme of the 46th session of the Commission. Ensuring that older people are covered by social protection in the informal sector should be a core topic for the Commission, alongside the right of older people to decent work and to social security. Work is the norm into very old age for men and for women, often in insecure, demeaning and low paid jobs, often in the informal sector with no social security provision. Age also brings discrimination in the workplace. The less developed the country, the higher the proportion of older people who continue to work. In least developed countries 71 per cent of older men and 37 per cent of older women work compared with 22 per cent of older men and 11 per cent of older women in more developed countries.[1]

Member State action

18. Member State obligations under the decent work agenda, the Madrid Plan of Action and human rights treaties must be recognized and put into action. Member States have the duty to include older people, as well as other groups that are marginalized and discriminated against, in national policies and programmes on work and the furthering of human rights.

[8] Economic Policy Research Institute, South Africa, ODI London presentation, October 2007.

[9] UNDESA, World Economic and Social Survey 2007.